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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 04 BAGHDAD 003957

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SUBJECT: US SPECIAL ENVOY FOR COUNTERING PKK IN BAGHDAD,
DISCUSSES MAKHMOUR CAMP CLOSURE

Classified By: Political Counselor Margaret Scobey for reasons 1.4 (b)
and (d).

11. (C) SUMMARY: In a series of meetings in Baghdad on October 18, U.S. Special Envoy for Countering the PKK General (R) Joseph Ralston discussed the ongoing PKK issue with President Talabani, Foreign Minister Zebari, Iraqi PKK Coordinator Shirwan al-Wa'ili, and UN High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) representative Janvier de Riedmatten. Although Ralston concentrated on the Makhmour Camp issue during this visit, he also discussed the need to continue verifying the closures of PKK-affiliated offices in Iraq. Iraqi officials stressed that they believed the PKK-front offices had been closed, but were willing to allow Iraqi and Coalition forces - along with a Turkish liaison officer - to independently verify the closures. Both Talabani and Zebari noted that the recent tensions in the Iraq-Turkey relationship lay with the Turkish General Staff (TGS), and argued that Iraq's significant efforts to meet Turkish demands went unrecognized by Ankara. Talabani, in fact, suggested that the recent increase in interest in the PKK issue arose mainly because of the coming Turkish elections. Despite Iraqi officials' and de Riedmatten's suggestions, Ralston noted that a general amnesty would not be a feasible means of resolving the ongoing PKK conflict. Finally, Zebari asked Ralston about the possibility for trilateral discussions between the GOI, GOT and USG. Ralston responded that bilateral discussions might work best in the short-term given Turkey's upcoming elections. END SUMMARY.

Turkey and Iraq: State of the Relationship

12. (C) Foreign Minister Hoshyar Zebari told Special Envoy for Countering the PKK General (R) Joseph Ralston during their meeting on October 18 that he has worked well with Turkish officials on PKK issues and that problems have arisen not with the Government of Turkey (GOT), but with the Turkish General Staff (TGS).
(NOTE: In

a separate meeting, President Talabani commented to Ralston that he suspected the coming election cycle in Ankara has spurred the increased interest in the PKK issue. END NOTE) He commented that the GOT does not have a unified opinion on how to deal with Kurds in Turkey, stating that Turkish intelligence officials have recently stated they want a "political solution to Turkey's Kurdish issue" instead of a military solution. Zebari highlighted the economic cooperation between the two countries, citing an August 2006 agreement to open border gates, begin direct Istanbul-Baghdad flights, railway access, and the Government of Iraq's (GOI) active support of Turkish involvement in Iraq's reconstruction efforts. Zebari noted that the PKK has been given a "firm warning" that the KRG will not allow "a situation like Hezbollah and Israel to develop," and lauded the PKK's recent declaration on "cessation of hostilities." Zebari commented that while Ocalan remains the PKK's leader, there are many divisions within the group. Zebari also stated that there are many opportunities for intelligence sharing and improved cooperation between the KRG and GOT, stating that it has happened in the past, but "it is not systematic right now."

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Closure of PKK-Front Offices in Iraq

13. (C) In all his meetings with Iraqi officials, Ralston praised the GOI for actions taken against the PKK, such as the appointment of Minister of State for National Security Shirwan al-Wa'ili as Iraq's PKK Coordinator, and the GOI's statement condemning the PKK as a terrorist organization. However, Ralston stated, the GOI announcement on the PKK and the subsequent closures of the PKK-front offices in Iraq had not satisfied the GOT. According to Ralston, the GOT believed the wording in the public announcement did not condemn the PKK strongly enough. He also repeated Ankara's claims that some of the PKK-front offices were still open, but reported that Turkey had agreed to send a Turkish liaison officer to accompany Iraqi and Coalition forces on special patrols to monitor the closures of the PKK-front offices.

14. (C) Both Zebari and al-Wa'ili noted that the PKK-front offices in Baghdad and in the Kurdistan region had been closed. Talabani noted with some frustration that Iraq was trying to accommodate Turkey's demands. He corrected Ralston's usage of the term "PKK offices", stating that there were no PKK offices in Iraq only offices run by

parties that were sympathetic to the PKK cause such as the Kurdistan Democratic Solutions Party (KDSP). The KDSP is registered as legitimate political party in the Kurdistan region through an oversight on the part of the Independent Electoral Commission of Iraq (IECI), Talabani noted, and therefore when their offices are closed down they can legally fight to reopen them. In another attempt to reassure Ankara, Iraqi authorities recently arrested the KDSP party leader, Dr. Gulpi, in Sulaymaniyah. Judges in Kurdistan released him, however, after a few days detention. Talabani emphasized that Iraq is bending the rule of law for the sake of relations with Turkey without any Turkish recognition of its efforts. Presidency Council Chief of Staff Kamran Karadaghi wryly noted, "democracy is sometimes a problem."

Resolving Makhmour

15. (C) Ralston discussed with UN High Commission for Refugee's (UNHCR) Representative for Iraq Operations, Janvier de Riedmatten, the future of the Makhmour refugee camp in Ninewa. De Riedmatten informed Ralston that UNHCR, GOI and Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) representatives met on Oct 17 to address the presence of PKK fighters at the camp. While the GOI and the KRG were not ready to discuss the specific steps that would be required to restore the humanitarian character of the camp (i.e., expel the PKK), they agreed to study UNHCR's proposed plan of operations to confront this issue and get back to UNHCR the first week of November (septel). De Riedmatten explained to Ralston that in order to close the camp, UNHCR would need to register the refugees, conduct a survey

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of intentions, and repatriate or resettle the refugees. The registration and survey exercises require the prior restoration of a secure environment in the camp, so the refugees may speak free of PKK intimidation. The survey would also require UNHCR and the governments of Turkey and Iraq to finalize the Tripartite Agreement that lays out each party's commitments to facilitate the voluntary repatriation of the refugees.

16. (C) De Riedmatten estimated that operations to restore the humanitarian character of the camp could take two weeks, registering the refugees one week, and concluding a survey of intentions four weeks. He said that, with so many other issues going on in Iraq, resolving the Makhmour situation was not a high priority for the GOI. De Riedmatten welcomed General Ralston's offer to press the issue in

his meetings with Talabani and al-Wa'ili, as well as with GOT officials. Ralston agreed with De Riedmatten that restoring the civilian character of the camp and finalizing a tripartite agreement should move forward in parallel. While de Riedmatten confirmed that the GOI had not formally responded to High Commissioner's Guterres June 1 letter, he did not believe that a formal response was required in order to continue addressing the issue (NOTE: The letter does not specifically ask Talabani to formally respond to it. END NOTE.)

17. (C) Ralston brought up the issue during his meetings with Talabani, Zebari and al-Wa'ili, noting that Turkey is waiting for a response from Iraq on the UNHCR paper on the increasingly dire situation in the Makhmour refugee camp in northern Iraq. Ralston suggested that Iraqi forces go to the camp to remove arms, identify civilians and survey the population to determine where to relocate the residents. Talabani insisted Makhmour should not be such a problem, and General Casey was welcome to send troops if he chose. He did acknowledge, however, that there may be problems relocating residents. Talabani agreed it would be hard to move refugees from their current location because winter is coming and they will need shelter. Zebari also noted that over the past three years, the number of people living in the Makhmour camp has risen. People have been encouraged - though not forced - to repatriate to Turkey. Wa'ili agreed to assist UNHCR to restore the civilian nature of Makhmour, and requested Ralston's assistance in contacting UNHCR, the Red Cross, and Turkish Special Envoy General Baser.

The Question of Amnesty

18. (C) One significant step forward to resolving the Makhmour Camp issue was the possibility of amnesty, both the Iraqi officials and de Riedmatten noted. De Riedmatten did not know how many refugees would want to return to Turkey, particularly if the GOT does not offer a general amnesty or other formal guarantees to the refugees that they have nothing to fear. Most of the 11,000 refugees are women,

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children and elderly people. The KRG and the GOI were not receptive to the idea of locally integrating some of the refugees. Talabani suggested that the PKK would willingly lay down their arms in exchange for a general amnesty. Ralston stated that there were too many problems with a general amnesty, and dismissed it as a feasible solution.

Trilateral Talks

19. (C) Finally, Zebari asked Ralston about the possibility for trilateral discussions between the GOI, GOT and USG. Ralston responded that bilateral discussions might work best in the short-term given Turkey's upcoming elections. Ralston then requested the Zebari's assistance in obtaining President Talabani's signature on a letter sent by the UNHCR on Makhmour, noting its importance to the GOT and suggesting that this could move forward a tripartite agreement.
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